



U.S. Embassy Prague - Roma Integration Initiatives

Experts estimate there are 200,000 to 250,000 Romani people living in the Czech Republic, representing approximately 2.5% of the population. Up to 95% of the Czech Roma population was killed during the Holocaust. Romani people continue to face discrimination in education, housing, and employment. In some areas where Roma represent a substantial portion of the population, unemployment rates range as high as 80-90%. One of the Embassy's mission goals is to encourage protection of minority rights and minority civic participation. To that end, the Embassy has engaged in the following integration initiatives:

Inclusive Education

- Through the Public Affairs Section's Small Grants Program, the Embassy supports a number of local NGOs that are working to provide inclusive and multi-cultural training to teachers and to university-level students majoring in Education.
- In November 2012, on the 5th anniversary of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights on *DH vs. the Czech Republic*, the Ambassador hosted a dinner that brought together the EU Human Rights Commissioner, various European Ambassadors, NGO activists, and Roma community representatives, including one of the original plaintiffs in the case. The case was a milestone for Roma communities in the CR because the court found the Czech government was not providing Romani students equal access to education, thereby violating their human rights. Most experts agree there has been little progress.
- The Ambassador traveled to northern Bohemia in June 2012 to engage in Roma outreach activities, which focused on inclusive education. He visited a "practical" or remedial school, as well as a mainstream school that has successfully achieved a model of integrated education that includes students of various backgrounds and ages.

Outreach Events

- In 2012, the Embassy awarded the annual Alice G. Masaryk Human Rights Award to Romea.cz, an online newserver that provides original reporting on issues touching Roma communities in Central Europe that are generally not covered by mainstream media outlets. The event highlighted the often unfair depiction of Roma people in the media.
- Each year, the Ambassador or other Embassy officials attend Roma Holocaust commemoration events such as are held at the site of former concentration camps in Lety and Hodonin.
- In April 2013, the Ambassador traveled to Usti nad Labem together with the Czech Human Rights Commissioner and the Norwegian Ambassador to discuss housing issues affecting the Roma population and showcase the city's program to integrate socially-excluded families into mainstream housing. In October 2012, the Human Rights Officer traveled to the northeastern city of Ostrava to engage local Roma communities, city officials and NGOs on continuing evictions of Romani people from their substandard accommodations.
- In March 2013, during his own trip to Ostrava, the Ambassador delivered remarks and cut the ribbon at the opening event for new officials of Life Together, a high-profile NGO that works on behalf of Roma in the region.
- The Political-Economic and Public Affairs Sections have supported a series of roundtable discussions on Roma issues as they relate to the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. Last year, PAS funded the translation of a book of his speeches, which inspired the country-wide discussion series.
- Through small grants, the Public Affairs Section supported an NGO public awareness campaign called, "We Want to Work." The campaign highlighted the struggle many Romani people experience in securing employment.

Youth Initiatives

- Embassy officials cooperated with the American Chamber of Commerce Czech Republic to recruit three American-owned companies to participate in a pilot internship project focused on Roma students. The Embassy worked with NGOs such as the Open Society Fund to expand the applicant pool. Hired interns will work with an Embassy mentor to also learn about how an embassy functions, thereby giving them exposure to work in both the private and public sectors. The program should be officially launched this summer.
- In December, 2012, the Ambassador hosted a dinner for young Roma students where Embassy officers provided a special presentation on the Fulbright program.
- In January 2013, three Czech Roma joined three Slovak Roma on a regional IVLP trip to DC, Atlanta, Kalamazoo, MI, Portland, OR, and New York. The trip focused on leveraging the media to get out messages on minority rights issues. It also fostered cooperation between up and coming Roma leaders in the Czech and Slovak Republics.